



## Senior Executives' Meeting

July 18-19, 2006  
National Park Service – Midwest Regional Office  
Omaha, Nebraska

### MEETING NOTES

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**Tuesday, July 18, 2006**

**Welcome and Introductory Comments:** Bharat Mathur (EPA), Vice-Chair, commended Ernie Quintana (NPS) for his leadership and accomplishments as Chair over the last year. Great turnout for this MNRG meeting reflects this success. Ernie & John Sowl (NPS) successfully led the effort on the Terrestrial Invasive Species Action Plan. Bharat indicated he was extremely glad to see the report and recognized that this was the first time MNRG spent this type of time on non-native invasive species (NNIS). "Ernie came to the organization and immediately made a contribution. MNRG's purpose is to network, get better acquainted with others' goals and, when appropriate, work together on projects. It is about relationships. Once we talked about disbanding. Now we've taken on our first major item." Bharat indicated he's prepared to commit EPA to the plan's next steps and is committed to help implement the plan. The agenda includes a series of presentations to identify some common ground including a tribal topic. We can maximize benefits through common effort. Bharat is looking forward for moving onward in this spirit and perhaps our next initiative. He'd like to host the next MNRG meeting in downtown Chicago at the EPA's office.

#### **Presentation of MNRG Terrestrial Invasive Species Action & Implementation Plan for The Great Lakes Region:**

Jerrilyn Thompson, NPS, summarized the proceedings from the MNRG's Annual Meeting (Nov, '05) and it's directions to develop an Action Plan for Terrestrial Non-Native Invasive Species. Agencies came to that meeting with information and commitment to action. The outcome was to form an MNRG task force to develop a terrestrial non-native invasive species action plan. An MNRG inter-agency team was assembled and developed a final draft action plan in less than five months. The development team was enthusiastic about the plan and agreed to take Ernie's challenge to "continue to put our foot into door and push it open for non-native invasive species work". Planning began at the end of January with multiple team conference calls between April and June – including a face-to-face intensive workshop in Minneapolis in April – with completion of the final draft Action Plan in mid-June. Craig Kellogg's talk about a new threat (emerald ash borer) reinforces the need for this plan, approximately five months from its beginning. Carmen Chapin, NPS NNIS Coordinator and member of the Action Plan team, volunteered to present an overview of the action plan to the MNRG seniors (A copy of Carmen's PowerPoint presentation can be found on the MNRG

website).

Carmen covered the plan's primary objectives, the planning process, nine action plan elements with issues and actions for each element, and how the plan can be applied. The team used the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) plan as their template and ensured that plan elements paralleled those of the NISC plan. The action plan focuses on the need to establish invasive species awareness and management responsibilities as part of agency culture. Immediate actions identified in the plan were to:

- Re-affirm and revise the MNRG's Invasive Species MOA
- Create a Great Lakes Terrestrial Invasive Species Committee (GL-TISC)
- Send letters of support to key partners (NISC, St. Louis code of conduct)
- Seek recognition and support for the plan from NISC

Continued actions proposed include:

- Identify additional participants
- Prioritize actions and develop timelines
- Collaborate and cooperate to complete measurable results

The team acknowledges the need to prioritize actions and develop timelines but found it inappropriate to go further at this time until they could assure that all the appropriate people were at the table for the discussion.

#### **Discussion of Action Plan**

**QUESTION:** Ernie, NPS, asked about mapping invasive species change from 1986 to 2006.

**RESPONSE:** Yes, this would be addressed under data management. Agreed to make sure this is clear under action item.

A point was raised regarding the NISC on page 2.

**QUESTION:** Does the NISC need to review and support the MNRG Action Plan?

**RESPONSE:** David Vigh, USACE, indicated that the NISC doesn't really get into approving or endorsing plans. The NISC has already indicated that they are impressed with the Action Plan. They're more interested in whether the federal agency executives really buy into the plan.

**QUESTION:** What's needed to move forward with the plan? How many resources are needed to support the TISC? Would this be a committee under the MNRG?

**RESPONSE:** The MNRG Action Plan team could be reauthorized to serve as core for TISC. The task team worked well together.

**QUESTION:** How would the team operate?

**RESPONSE:** The team would select a chair and attend MNRG meetings to keep the senior leadership updated on invasive species work. The team would take charge of tracking implementation of the action plan elements and would come forward with any additional actions items or if more support is needed.

**COMMENT:** Ernie suggested that individuals currently on the Action Plan committee could begin the TISC and build from there. The current team would be the basis for starting the group. We do need to add agencies that are not currently represented on the team. The MNRG will have a TISC member contact NISC.

**RESPONSE:** There are a number of federal agency coordination efforts nationally. This action plan is one of the first with a terrestrial invasive species focus. The MNRG could extend an invitation to the NISC to participate as well as to additional groups and tribes. We could also consider adding New York and Pennsylvania to the group. MNRG will support the creation of the TISC based initially on the Action Plan team. Some agencies may adjust their TISC representative. Regional and state invasive species groups will be invited to

work with the TISC. Be inclusive rather than inclusive with partnership members like the Wisconsin DNR and the Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN). We need an outreach plan and a partnership plan. Bharat concurred with keeping the TISC as an MNRG committee, with non-federal partners as associates or partners. The spirit of regional cooperation is important. We need to increase our outreach through such a plan in order to proceed wisely. We need to increase outreach. Robyn Thorson (FWS) recommended that the MNRG chair attend the TISC meetings. Partners can offer great resources.

**COMMENT:** Merlin Bartz, NRCS – He likes the efficiency focus of the action plan effort. We're not going to see increased budgets so it's important not to duplicate our invasive species control efforts. He suggests that the MNRG chair and vice chair work with the action plan team to refine the TISC members and develop guidelines as the TISC is formed. He supports the charge to review and improve the current MNRG Invasive Species MOA to address this need. The plan needs to follow the principles from Act. Update the MOA with both Executive Orders (from the Bush and Clinton administrations) for the Great Lakes basin. The plan should also reference authorities in the MOA. Regarding applicability to the Great Lakes Regional Commission (GLRC) strategy, the TISC should review its work at its 1<sup>st</sup> year anniversary, so this may be one of the significant accomplishments from the 2004 Executive Order. The MNRG Action Plan is one of the 48 action items that the Interagency Task Force agreed to do. We need to focus on the connection between the federal agencies and what the GLRC Executive Committee on Invasive Species is looking to collaborate on (as part of our outreach). Letters of support can be drafted by the TISC. The first two items should be easy to complete. The MNRG chairperson would send in one letter for all the member agencies. We also need a letter to the Interagency Task Force of the GLRC to provide the Action Plan to them to follow up on our earlier letter.

**QUESTION:** Michael Nedd, BLM, asked what are the highest priorities within the Action Plan? He stated that the plan was solid, but suggested that education should be a higher priority. Others agreed that education should be a high priority in the action plan.

**RESPONSE:** The team recognized the importance of education and the difficult tradeoffs we face with limited funds. The TISC needs to identify priorities within the action plan and then it will come back to the MNRG with these priorities. Agency members will offer priorities as the group begins.

Bharat said he was ready to go through the plan in detail. He suggested that the MNRG endorse the plan's 9 elements and then ask that we select the actions that each individual agency can contribute to. He asked that the TISC get a memo back to the principles asking each agency to indicate how they can respond to the Action Plan. This memo should be prepared by the TISC as soon as possible. We should sign and formally adopt the Action Plan. Ernie commented that if we remove page 3, we could endorse the plan today. The seniors all agreed with this in concept.

Randy Moore (USFS) shared a matrix/crosswalk the Forest Service has done that demonstrate that the Action Plan matches well with actions the Forest Service has committed to do. Randy challenge other agencies to match dollars, perhaps \$10,000 for each agency to address the actions outlined in the plan. He wants to show results on the ground. Randy Moore's challenge was acknowledged, Ernie indicated we could build on this challenge.

Discussion shifted back to approving the Action Plan. Various suggestions were made and then Robyn suggested we could title this "A Plan for Action...". Mike Nedd made a motion to leave the plan as it is, drop page 3, and move forward. David Vigh seconded the motion and proposed to amend the plan by adding a statement directing coordination with NISC. This motion passed. Ernie indicated that it was good that we could leave with agreement on this. He thanked the action plan team again for doing the hard work on this and the senior executives for their support and for being here. We are going to endorse this as "A Plan for Action...". He asked that a signature page be prepared for the principles to sign before they leave here. This was done by John Sowl and it was signed by those agencies present.

**Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Presentation:** Craig Kellogg, EAB Program Manager for APHIS in Michigan. There's a cooperative program for EAB which involves USDA/APHIS, other federal agencies, states (Depts. of Agriculture and State Foresters), and Canada. EAB was first discovered in Michigan in 2001, but it's probably been in the US for 10 years. Craig described EAB symptoms and impact. He showed examples of tree losses to communities and described the high cost for removal. Individual trees can be hundreds to thousands of dollars to remove, cut, grind down or chip, and take to a power plant as fuel for energy generation. Control work is from outside in. Quarantines are established to keep wood within infected areas. EAB was most recently found in Cook County, Illinois. EAB works from top down in the tree. It kills all ash species in area. Michigan estimates that it has 700-800 million ash trees in state. EAB represents a potentially huge cost for disposal and loss for nurseries. A FEMA request for assistance has been made. Damage is first gradual, and then accelerates. Economic loss includes reduced value for home resale when whole neighborhoods are affected. Estimates of the value for native ash project are \$50-60 billion in related economic losses nation wide. Some western cities have almost 50% ash trees along their streets. National Science Advisory Panels (SAP) develops best management recommendation. National EAB management team (feds /states) coordinate activities and strategy. The key is don't move firewood and watch nursery stock. There's quarantine on firewood across lower Michigan. All firewood must be regulated. All land managers need to review their firewood policy. There are lots of "agents" to move firewood – out-of-state sportsmen, campers and even events like NASCAR (where fans buy cheap firewood). Education and Outreach help to contain the spread. Bumper stickers, billboards, education materials have already been developed for public use. Scientists are working on bait/lure and traps for EAB. Some chemicals help but there's no cure yet. Mulching ash to a size that is under 1 inch is pretty safe. EAB is from China. Little is know about EAB; we've only had three years to study it. Ash trees in China are stressed by EAB, but not killed. However, here In the US, all ash species are killed by EAB. The EAB can fly up to 6 miles. Most EAB spread within ½ mile from their last location. It cost Ann Arbor \$4.3 million to remove all affected ash. The public voted down a measure to control. Canada spent \$9 million to create an ash-free zone which ultimately failed because EAB had already spread beyond the area cut. Information available at [www.emeraldashborer.info](http://www.emeraldashborer.info)

**Update on the "Great Lakes Listening Session"** Robyn Thorson, USFWS.

Last summer USFWS hosted a Great Lakes Listening Session as a response to the Presidential Exec Order on the Great Lakes. Robyn found it beneficial to listen to stakeholders about what they think their agency must do /nice to do. The purpose was to let the public describe what they'd like to see in the way of actions regarding the Great Lakes, so they asked stakeholders and employees to report. They agreed on 3 of 8 priorities: invasive species, habitat protection, and indicator species. This was an example of one way to interact with stakeholders. Stakeholders want inclusive USFWS leadership in Great Lakes. Staff tried to just listen, not talk. This feedback validated continuing the course. To date, the USFWS focus in the Midwest has been "all about ducks" in the past. The agency wanted to see if the public wanted something else. Employees loved the validation, but may not have thought it was a good use of time. Regional committee agreed to do a wetland and aquatic invasive species focus, now terrestrial invasive species are also a priority. USDI is doing a wave of listening sessions.

**Update on the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration** - David Vigh, USACE.

*The Spirit of Cooperation* is the theme for this major conference April 22-27, 2007 in Kansas City, Missouri. It is a spin-off from a similar Everglades Restoration Conference in 2004. This is one of the biggest of its kind in the country – a potential audience of 1500; 300 presenters; 36-40 booths. The Corps and USGS are major sponsors (\$70K each). David chairs the planning committee and asked for support from MNRG members to help get the word out, distribute materials, and to participate in the conference by presenting papers, moderating a session, through exhibit booths, poster sessions, or as a sponsor. There's a call for abstracts by 12/15/06. The conference was brought to middle of the US to focus on Great Rivers. David wants MNRG's logo on conference material. David highlighted features/agenda for conference. There will be

five concurrent sessions. Exhibit booths will cost \$2500; posters/table tops will cost \$500. Great field trips are planned. "Platinum" and "gold" partner levels are available for partnerships. Robyn suggested the MNRG can offer a presence to support conference. An invitation from the Washington Office Director level from a sponsoring agency would be beneficial for receiving agency support.

Bharat stated that the USACE can send Great Lakes Regional Commission members an invitation to participate. He suggested a Midwest role and then agency can contribute through the MNRG. He asked the MNRG's Great Lakes TISC to present options. EPA can offer to pay for some items such as mailing costs and he suggested that the rest do the same. He stated that we should distribute information about the conference among our peers. He agreed to task the Planning Committee to work out details. He suggested cabinet level involvement. It was suggested that MNRG could share an exhibit booth or two. The MNRG agreed to distribute conference information and offered to establish a conference sub-committee (to be defined by the Planning Committee) who will report at November meeting but some things are needed earlier like papers by October. Website: [www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/NCER2007](http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/NCER2007)

**Next MNRG Vice-Chair:** Ernie Quintana, MNRG Chair, asked for nominations or volunteers for a new MNRG vice chair. Robyn Thorson, USFWS, agreed to serve as the new vice chair indicating that she needed to live up to Bill Hartwig's example.

**Fall MNRG Meeting:** Bharat asked if downtown Chicago was acceptable to the group as the location for the November MNRG Annual Meeting. After discussion, the group agreed to meet at the EPA headquarters in downtown Chicago November 29-30. The EPA conference center includes a room that seats 250, plus good break out rooms. Hotels are very close.

**MNRG Communications Committee Report:** John Perrecone provided a Committee report and distributed bookmarks developed by the Communications Committee. The group noted that the Forest Service and FEMA were not included on the card. The group discussed the need for a strategy (talking points, etc) from the Communications Committee on how to distribute and update the bookmark in the future to include all agencies. A "walk through" on the MNRG website will be provided to show updates to the site. EPA manages the website for MNRG.

### **Agency Updates**

**USGS** – Cathy Hill indicated that USGS is co-sponsor of 2<sup>nd</sup> national mercury workshops and anticipates 1500 participants. There is significant international interest, particularly from China. The workshop objective is to come out with 1-2 top actions that can be done.

She is very pleased with the current direction of MNRG, moving to fewer focus areas increases effectiveness. Good work on invasive species plan by MNRG and is pleased to see it will carry on. Cathy announced her retirement. She's going into a new business.

**USACE** - Just awarded 6 national watershed project grants including one on the Middle Mississippi and another in the Great Lakes (\$1mil). The Steering Committee includes partners, allowing for some integration of priorities. This is something Congress asked for. USACE anticipates a slight decline in budget level. Recovery work in Mississippi and Louisiana continues to be a major focus. Senate is debating the Water Resources Act. The USACE is involved in Iraq and Afghanistan with many folks doing rotations there. Completing an Upper Mississippi map study. EMP program money is the same at 12-17 \$mil. The Louisiana coastal study is still not authorized. Congress is waiting to see how all the projects mesh before it's authorized. The USACE's 2012 reorganization is ongoing. Most change will come through attrition. Headquarters has similar problems to other agencies with no travel money and project funds being tight. The USACE is moving to regional business centers, rather than full service districts. The Great Lakes fish barrier issues are being worked through. Want to make temporary barriers permanent. The Great Lakes Region has new commanders in Detroit, Buffalo, Chicago and Huntington. Three ecosystem restoration programs are proposed. Congress wants a feasibility study prior to

funding. The Ohio River ecosystem program started last year, but is not funded this year. The project may be de-authorized. Several states sent letters of support to congress.

**BIA** – BIA still can't use the internet. The court may lift the agency's information technology constraints. Almost all tribes have Forest Management Plans/Integrated Resource Management Plans. These are a great resource to agencies because they identify the tribe's priorities and offer lots of partnership opportunities. BIA responded to many issues including roads projects, "No Child Left Behind," new housing construction, sustainability, 5 EISs for casinos, community development, federal facility management, and the Covell case.

**BLM** – Planning how to absorb 5% loss in buying power per year for the next 5 years. Analyzing impacts and developing new organizational proposals. BLM is focusing on the use of grants and partnerships; need to develop these skills in employees. It is looking for new employees with those kinds of skills. Now feds are looking for money from partners instead of them looking to us. BLM is considering a different approach to land use planning. It can't afford to do individual plans, so it's looking at regional plans. The existing approach to preparing plans cost \$1/2 million each using contractors. BLM is also looking at expanded use of video conferencing to reduce costs for meetings and field trips.

BLM is also working on lots of lighthouse projects with the Coast Guard and other affected parties. It has transferred Cana Island Lighthouse to Door County, Wisconsin. Thanks to USFWS for help on Biological Assessment on two T&E species. Plum Island & Pilot Lighthouses are the next transfers. These will be transferred to USFWS. Islands are excellent for bird habitat. Robyn indicated the USFWS's appreciation to BLM - islands are great opportunity to save habitat in the Great Lakes.

BLM is responsible for disposing of the remnants of Public Domain lands. There is a 57 acre parcel in Wisconsin that BLM is working on with the Lac du Flambeau band of the Ojibwe Tribe. It contains rice fields and burial grounds. The tribe is helping BLM inventory the sites. Looking at possibly retaining the parcel and partnering with the Tribe to preserve, monitor and manage impacts.

The agency is co-locating with USFS office in Rolla, Missouri on August 1<sup>st</sup>. It is working with the Forest Service in Michigan with Au Sable River EA litigation regarding a proposed natural gas well. The Forest Service manages the surface and BLM manages the minerals. If one is litigated, both agencies are litigated. There are a lot of partnerships happening.

**EPA** –Bharat passed out a sheet that listed EPA Region 5 priorities. The emphasis is on accountability and environmental results. We also emphasize collaboration and partnerships and the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration is a good example. The new EPA Administrator is a scientist so he encourages results based upon sound science. EPA Priorities with respect to the MNRG are the restoration of Great Lakes wetlands and beaches and sediment removal. The agency's budget is shrinking and we are looking at consolidation of activities within and among the Regions. The Region has adequate funds to meet its priorities as well as meeting any commitments made to the MNRG. Our outreach to working with other agencies is increasing such as our work on I-69 with the Federal Highway Administration. The Endangered Species Act applies to agency actions and we expect to work more with FWS on ESA issues as it applies to our Air program. The Region is working most closely with the tribes.

**FAA** – Elliott Black: New initiatives for collaboration. They're working with airports to improve relationships with states and other federal agencies. A question was asked by Ernie about Air Tour management plans. That's not in his division. NPS is developing a plan for Mt. Rushmore (they are working with an FAA rep from the west coast); it may be precedent-setting as one of the first plans to address new requirements. Elliott will check with the Bismarck FAA Office on this. The Air Traffic portion of FAA is being reorganized and consolidated. This is not affecting the airport division.

**NPS** – The agency is looking at how its organization should change given shortfalls and projections. Each NPS unit is doing Core Operations evaluations and going back to the legislation that created each unit. The NPS is working to ensure that fiscal resources are focused on supporting the core mission of each unit and will be redirected if these are not supported. They are using a budget cost projections model that will project out over 5 years given existing resources. By 2011, every park will have a serious deficit, so the purpose is to plan for that and reorganize now for the next 5 years. Multipliers that are being used reflect a worst case scenario, though there is some latitude to adjust it. Ultimately, a fixed cost of 80% is the goal. Units are currently going for 85%. Five Midwestern parks have begun this evaluation. None are fully completed at this time. The NPS is encouraging creativity to reduce costs. The agency is committed to change and is planning for the future. Congress doesn't take our word for it. We need to demonstrate progress and legitimately describe our needs to get credibility. The Midwest Region also does grant administration for the Intermountain Region. Even though Land & Water Conservation Fund spending is significantly reduced, the NPS still has responsibility to oversee all the grants and ensure compliance. Monitoring responsibility never goes away. So money is needed to do this. There is less staff to administer these programs, but a RIF is not anticipated. There are peaks and valleys for the budget in this area.

**Federal Highway** - New guidance is out for aquatic NNIS. Federal funds can be used for NNIS work, but may need to convince the state DOTs. The I-69 project in Indiana may show a new trend. Needs are always greater than available funds, so the state leased Indiana Toll Road for 99 years. This immediately gives the state funds to spend on projects. The new trend is to design, build and operate highways by private parties. The gasoline tax is good for another 20 years. Everyone is looking for different avenues from which to fund road projects.

### **Wednesday, July 19, 2005**

**USFWS**- The new secretary of the US Department of the Interior (USDI) is a former Congressman. The current focus is on things that can be accomplished in next 30 months. Farm bill, Katrina and wetlands are his issues.

If wetlands are not restored, Gulf coast issues are not solved. Endangered Species Act reform is slow. The agency has now completed wildlife strategies for all species. Its never had such a good encyclopedia of needs. There are massive vacancies within the National USFWS that will probably remain unfilled for now. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has a new Director. He worked for USDI and on Capitol Hill. It is anticipated that the organization will be more proactive working. The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Act authorized a grant program which has not been funded. OMB may be concerned about funding. The USFWS is using a structured decision-making process which is stringent in process and more transparent. This formidable process should help withstand litigation. The Cerulean warbler has been petitioned for listing and this could have significant effect. They are using this process in that decision, so stay tuned (there will be a decision in 2 months). Courses on this decision-making process are available at the National Fish and Wildlife Service's Training Institute. Since wetlands are the key issue, Region 3 is working to engage to keep the Midwest noticed.

**USFS** – All Administrative functions (budget, information systems and human resources) are being centralized in a Service Center in Albuquerque (ASC). In addition, about ½ of the Washington Office (WO) is to be relocated there at ASC also. The WO is currently evaluating its role in DC and which positions should be retained. Region 9 is reevaluating how we budget and is looking to move to a unified strategic budget. It is a big change from the de-centralized tradition of organization. However, there are big benefits from the flexibility it offers us. The Eastern Region was under its overhead cap by \$2 million, so they were able to use the savings for projects on ground. No other region came close to their cap. The Eastern Region will pilot the use of a unified budget for the region. Most of the leadership supports this. The Region is nearing a major milestone in Forest Planning. In the past Forest Plan revisions took 6-7 years to complete. Randy challenged the forests to complete their revisions in 2 years and they've

accomplished this in about 2 ½ years. The last plan will be done in September. The estimate is that this may have saved about \$60 million. Another important effort has been to reach out to non-traditional public through the Urban Connection program. Recent projects have included assisting in making the Superbowl in Detroit carbon neutral. They're now working on an NFL agreement to participate in all future pro and superbows. We have Urban Connections staff in Detroit, Boston and active programs in Chicago. We're working with Gumbo, a teen magazine to provide interviews and ads about job opportunities in natural resources. We've developed a new vision for the Region -- "Courageous Conservation". That vision matches well our work with MNRG. We received approval from the Secretary for a purchase area on the Middle Mississippi to restore bottomland hardwoods from marginal farms. We are just starting a carbon neutral focus -- looking at how we create value from clean air and water, increase water quantity. We're "growing clean air". Forest Service would like to work with other agencies on this. We also are looking for new leaders -- currently working on a recruitment initiative and exploring new ways of bringing employees in at entry and mid-level. Forest Service is working with tribes on a major Conference on Sustainability and Traditional Knowledge that is planned for June '07.

**NRCS** -- The NRCS Chief is leaving to lead the USDA marketing efforts. The New Deputy Chief, Kevin Brown, is from Ohio. The Budget is in conference; it appears that several programs will be funded above last year's levels. Wetlands are a major emphasis. The Senate marks look to protect 250,000 in acres. The Farm Bill preparation is underway; there's a focus on better, more transparent formulas. There is a strong emphasis on performance measures (Red/Yellow/Green chart), like how many wetlands have been created, how many restored. They're falling short on their comprehensive plan's goal. Farm Bill Agriculture Committee hearings are coming up so NRCS is developing conservation resources briefs, budget goals and accomplishments. The new arena is grants programs for biomass in 2005, cooperative conservation, a new center, and \$2 million in grants to develop tools for techniques to improve and restore wetlands. Within the agency, they're improving bonus incentives to states that perform. Lots of emergency protection is tied to Katrina on the ground in Louisiana. There are Healthy Forest restoration projects in Arkansas, Mississippi and Maine. New web soil survey information now available. NRCS has also developed three new energy estimator tools (irrigation efficiency, a nitrogen application tool and a comparison of minimal vs. conventional till). Core Operations (Business Analysis) evaluations are being done in conjunction with other farm service agencies (consolidating offices, etc). There is a new human capital plan. More funds are being directed to watersheds. NRCS is morphing from watershed-based to geopolitical boundaries. Highest number of tier 3 watersheds and rapid watershed assessment are some focus areas. It is difficult to identify farmers doing environmentally friendly practices because there are big differences between the states on criteria. There is a growing dilemma for funding assistance between traditional farmers and urban customers and the performance of the agency. There are lots of requests from new landowners vs. from farm communities (10 acre vs 1000 acre landowners).

**FEMA** -- FEMA has 3 Regional Offices covering parts of the MNRG states. The FEMA Region V representative will coordinate with all. Region V is dealing with a number of disasters and expects to close Joint Field Offices in Illinois and Minnesota. A new Joint Field Office has just opened in Ohio. Many staff are still working in the Gulf. Region V is also watching wildfire potential in Minnesota. The Senate's Collins-Lieberman provisions would have FEMA remain in Homeland Security but be more independent like Coast Guard. The Principal Federal Official position would be eliminated. Mitigation disaster assistance would change from 7 ½ to 10% of the Federal cost of a disaster. FEMA has funded state and local buyouts of property in flood plains under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Some properties have been transferred to federal land management agencies in the past. FEMA is a principal coordinating agency in the National Response Plan. Response is coordinated on all disasters including oil spills, the space shuttle crash, terrorism, and tribal issues - all manmade and natural risks. Any agency can participate in FEMA exercises. A major national exercise, SONS07 has an earthquake scenario on the New Madrid fault. It also includes clean up and management of oil spills on both the Great Lakes and Mississippi River, the first non-coastal SONS exercise. SONS07 would be good way



to test your COOP plans. More information is available at [https://www.sons-program.org/SONS/SONS\\_07.nsf/mainpage?OpenForm](https://www.sons-program.org/SONS/SONS_07.nsf/mainpage?OpenForm).

**Federal Agency Coordination on Tribal Lands** Bharat mentioned the need to improve coordination with tribes one year ago at an MNRG meeting. He agreed to work with BIA and met with Terry Virden. There is very strong support from BIA on improving coordination. This presentation will lay out possible a series of steps for the MNRG. Margaret Guerriero (EPA) – The MNRG charter recognizes related responsibilities, the need for collaboration in areas of common ground and seeking new areas to focus resources. This proposal fits within the charter. Delivery of services to Indian country is a shared responsibility. The MNRG agencies are meeting and working on this. The group lacks support of senior leadership on tribal issues. Work needs to be aligned with agency policy direction. Resources are critical. The MNRG can clarify responsibilities and how to respond to assistance requested from the tribes. We should seek opportunities to optimize the delivery of services to “Indian country”, identify common issues, as well as new opportunities. The desired outcome is to have clearly defined responsibilities on overlapping issues, aligned commitments for special projects, incorporation of other agency roles when prioritizing, leveraged resources (who can fund what), training and technical assistance. Handouts were provided identifying potential roles for the MNRG on a draft matrix of agency roles/issues that needs to be reviewed and updated by the agencies. Not all agencies are on this list. Another handout outlines Issues in “Indian country.” This list is very much a draft. Waste management covers many of the MNRG agencies. The Forest Service needs to be added. The mining issue needs to include BLM. We will talk about how we’ll update and include comments.

Herb Nelson, BIA: – Provided an overview on the MOU and the Work Group efforts. The MOU was initiated in 1992, updated in 1999, and revision is currently being refined. The Work Group has met since 1992. The original purpose was to prevent double dipping on projects. Now tribes express priorities, agencies use their authorities and funding to help the tribes. Current MOU members include BIA, Indian Health Service, EPA; USDA Rural Development and the COE are not members but attend. Tribes have an active role but are not signatories to the MOU. The Work Group meets quarterly. Agency attendees to the Work Group are mid-level. The Chair rotates every 2 years. Past projects include capping 31 tribal dumps, waste management grants and planning (leveraged EPA planning money with IHS/BIA construction money). There is lots of waste management work, a water resources reference guide, ESA, Mining impacts, brownfields, agency training teams, and resource management planning coordination. There has been past contact with the MNRG and a summarization of MOU accomplishments. Take it back to your agencies. Compare missions – it's natural resource-oriented and the MOU is focused on environmental compliance. Agencies come and go based on issues. The Work Group is seeking recommitment from senior leadership and additional members. The MOU Work Group is an excellent means to learn about tribal trust issues and government-to- government consultation with tribes. Herb Nelson, BIA Midwest Regional Environmental Coordinator, can be contacted at 612-725-4510.

Discussion: Merlin – There isn't a conflict between the MOU and the MNRG's natural resource focus. The focus is broader than just compliance. Herb agreed and provided examples of broader activities undertaken by the group. A question arose on whether the USACE could join the agreement. The USACE indicated that this could probably be dealt with. Bharat- Mining issue is becoming big – new mines and reopening of taconite mines on federal and tribal lands. He heard about the emerald ash borer first through the MOU Group. Next Step- What's MNRG's role: A forum within which the MOU group can raise issues needing interagency coordination or senior level resource decisions? Should the organization establish an executive-level group to communicate priorities and serve as a sounding board for the MOU group and develop agreements amongst various agencies? Bharat – The MOU group needs the cooperation of senior leaders to be effective. The MNRG provides the mechanism for the MOU group to link with seniors. This could reduce the number of meetings. He suggests that all agencies become members of the MOU Work Group. Review the draft MOU and look at the bigger picture. Each agency has individual commitments. Our role is to do this in coordination. Tribal reps will not be

signatories. The philosophy is federal agencies are trying to provide service. They're not telling the tribes what's good for them but would be coordinating services and responding to tribes on issues they've identified.

There was some discussion on the need for the Work Group to have a senior MNRG representative to participate in their meetings so they could bring issues back to the MNRG. There was also discussion on Work Group updates as a standing agenda item for future MNRG meetings. There was some discussion of the extent of MNRG involvement with the Work Group as being that of support, direction and guidance. A paper describing an appropriate role was suggested. It was stated that the MNRG understands the need for coordination between agencies to optimize service to "Indian country." We could get information at each MNRG meeting to improve our coordination. The Planning Committee can formulate this. The seniors agreed with the concept that this is an opportunity and a forum. The MNRG cannot commit the agencies. The Group has agreed about this role. A motion was made by Bharat, David Vigh second, to create the forum for all to use. All voted in favor. The second issue was a request that all agencies consider participating in Work Group meetings and in signing the Work Group MOU. All can participate in redrafting the MOU. BIA will send a letter inviting all agencies in the MNRG to send a representative to the Work Group meetings and to participate in redrafting the MOU. A motion is not needed to do this. The Planning Committee will provide a liaison list. Language will be reworked in the MOU. Herb & Margaret will take the lead. This is a separate agency role from the MNRG. The MOU would not be signed as the "MNRG," but by each agency. The Planning Committee will clarify the language. The MNRG members agreed that a letter from the BIA was needed. The next MOU Work Group meeting is October 19<sup>th</sup> in Ashland, Wisconsin.

**Update on the Missouri River Basin Interagency Roundtable** –Tabled agenda item due to time constraints.

#### **Transition to EPA Leadership**

Ernie Quintana – We now have A Plan for Action addressing Terrestrial Invasive Species in Great Lakes Basin. The GL-TISC will meet soon to move forward. The George Wright Society meeting will be April 16 2007. Can the MNRG present a paper at that meeting? Ernie thanked FEMA for participating and asked FEMA to become a member of MNRG. Bharat indicated he will follow up and add the Forest Service and FEMA to the MNRG bookmark. Ernie offered his thanks to all involved in drafting the Invasive Species Plan for Action and reaffirmed his commitment that it would not sit on the shelf. Bharat presented Ernie and John Sowl with MNRG "ACE Awards" to recognize their leadership and contributions to the MNRG over the last year.

Bharat proposed that the MNRG consider wetland restoration as a major focus for the next year. John Perrecone indicated that the MNRG should rally around this issue at its November meeting. The Planning Committee can review opportunities through Coastal America projects and make sure there are no conflicts. The Planning Committee can then bring proposals to the MNRG to identify and look for partnerships and improve environmental conditions. We can identify what's critical and what makes sense. Ducks Unlimited wants to work on a project, starting small and taking it from there. Let's use the Coastal America program as a tool. Robyn suggested that the Planning Committee develop something that the MNRG could endorse in November. The question was raised as to how this links with the Great Lakes Regional Commission (GLRC) goals, committees and projects. It was suggested that we use the Commission's recently established committee for wetland coordination as a vehicle. Each agency already has representatives on the GLRC committee. This would be a good opportunity to promote the use of corporate partnerships.

**Closing Remarks** Ernie thanked everyone for their support and indicate that he was back to being a member again. He wished everyone a safe trip home.